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A VOCATIONAL PROJECT IN THE ENGLISH CLASS FEB 3 1927

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The class—Senior commercial boys, all respectably mediocre, none disconcertingly clever, yet rather fewer than usual determinedly lazy; all aghast if left to their own resources, but all willing to work (within reasonable limits!) if sufficiently stimulated.

The time—The middle of the winter, when energy and enthusiasm seemed steadily ebbing, after the long fall term.

The tasks before us—A long written theme, a floor talk, outside reading, application of principles of drill in punctuation, sentence structure, and word study. Here surely were several large birds to be killed.

The question—How might I rouse the flagging spirit of the boys to attack such tasks with vigor?

The answer—Inevitably (to be pedagogically fashionable) a project. True, but what sort of project for such a group? What did they like to do? What previous class work had seemed least boresome? Ah, Center's *The Worker and His Work*; they had been almost enthusiastic about that on certain unguarded occasions. A vocational project! Perhaps that would do; we would call it a study of occupations.

In a flash the idea took shape: first some bit of motivation, then the study of the general field, next the choice of a special occupation for individual study, home reading on the chosen subject, writing a long theme, delivering a briefer talk. And before we were aware, the project would have led to fulfillment of all the tasks; all the plump birds would be slain by the one large stone.

Carrying out the project—In a matter-of-fact way I announced that the next written work would be on the subject *What My Father Does*, a topic which I had gratefully received from an experienced teacher and filed in memory for some such emergency. A flicker of amusement was politely suppressed; the boys were by now tolerant of their teacher's odd suggestions. This batch of papers was used to provoke discussion of occupations in general. Casually I inveigled someone into suggesting further study, and still with entire offhandness, hinted at possibilities. Not without a sly grin of appreciation for my tactics, the class accepted the suggestion. Just then the city vocational adviser opportunely arrived to conduct the annual record of students. So we enlisted her influence and found her a strong ally. With her help we soon had a small library of appropriate volumes. She also told us how similar plans had been carried out in other schools. Now our project was fairly launched.

First we took up the study of the general field of occupations. Here we made use of the following helpful books:

Gowin, Wheatley, and Brewer: *Occupations*.

Giles: *Vocational Civics*.

Ziegler and Jaquette: *Choosing an Occupation*.

Allen: *A Guide to the Study of Occupations*.

Ernst: *What Shall I Be?*

Weaver: *Profitable Vocations for Boys*.

I wrote on the board the nine general classes of occupations as listed by the United States Census Bureau and given on page 88 of Gowin and Wheatley, and got students to suggest one or two specific occupations that would be included in each class. For the next assignment they were directed to bring in a list of as many particular vocations as they could think of, classified under the nine headings. This led to some interesting inquiries, such as whether a baseball player belonged to the professions, and whether a Government meat inspector was a butcher or a public servant. Such questions were settled by an appeal to Allen's *A Guide to the Study of Occupations*, published by the Harvard University Press, which gives an exhaustive list of specific vocations arranged according to the Census Board

classification. In this way we arrived at a more intelligent understanding of the whole subject.

Following this, the boys were asked to spend an hour or more reading in these general books, so as to expand and clarify their idea of the whole subject. They were required simply to report what sections they had read.

The next step was the choosing of a certain occupation for individual study. This involved some teacher-pupil conferences. Then came the search for information on the chosen calling. Allen's bibliographies proved invaluable for this. Finally, each boy handed in a list of authorities he would like to consult on his special subject. One member of the class happened to be an assistant at the public library, so he worked with the reference librarian to get as many of the desired books as possible. With such helpful coöperation a deposit of nearly a hundred books was soon at our disposal.

Now came the time for reading. A number of days elapsed between the assignment and the date when the work was to be finished. Class time was spent on the study of literature, with occasional reference to the vocational work. I took the boys into my confidence as to the tasks ahead. Floor talks they expected, and accepted with chastened resignation. Long written reports, however, were new and alarming; in fact, at first many boys regarded them as unachievable. I reassured them by promising an outline of points to be covered. Here, I recognized, was a definite hurdle to be negotiated, for I realized that the "long theme" was rather outside the previous training of commercial pupils. Why not a series of several short themes? These would be less paralyzing to the students, and incidentally much less of a burden for the teacher to handle.

Here I consulted sample themes from other schools, which the vocational adviser had brought us, and finally decided on the following list of points to be covered.

Section I

1. What is the nature of this calling?
2. What special field appeals to you?
3. What things are actually done by a person in this calling?

- a. Enumerate them.
- b. Outline a typical day's work.

Section II

4. What are the main advantages of this occupation?
 - a. Chances for steady employment.
 - b. Chances for promotion.
 - c. Working conditions.
 - d. Income at first and later.
 - e. Interesting work.
 - f. Friends and associates.
 - g. Personal development and satisfaction.
 - h. Service to the community and to the world.
5. What disadvantages are to be reckoned with?

(Consider the same points as under advantages.)

Section III

6. What are the qualifications necessary for success?
 - a. Physical powers and health.
 - b. Temperament.
 - c. Habits of mind.
 - d. Character.
 - e. Education and training.
 - (1) What sort?
 - (2) Where best obtained?
 - (3) Approximate cost?

The outline proved to be easily divisible into three sections. One section of the theme was due the next week, the second section the week following, the third section the week after that.

This division of the long theme into separate sections, let me say here, has proved a most helpful device. It sugarcoats the distasteful pill as successfully as anything I have ever tried. The pupil accomplishes his first long theme before he is fully aware of it, and he will see that, after all, the lengthier essay is not so much to be dreaded. I shall use this plan as a trick of transition from the usual theme of moderate length to the more sustained effort required in upper-class work.

The keeping of a bibliography was one required feature of the written report, and a few hints were given about note-taking. It is desirable for students to get some rudimentary idea of how to go about simple research work. Then, too, I trust the bibliographies will prove useful if the same project is adopted by other classes.

Search for information was not confined to books. Pupils visited shops and offices, and talked with men already successful in their chosen field. Some reports were written in interview or question-and-answer form.

Floor talks, or oral themes, were under way at once, and served to sustain interest. Pupils were allowed to duplicate some report, or merely take up some interesting detailed feature of their chosen occupation. The result was a fairly varied set of topics. Of course one gratifying feature of the study has been the tapping of special interests in some pupils; many have studied occupations they have previously decided to take up; some have spoken on work they are already familiar with; and one or two, apparently on the theory of the attraction of opposites, have gone in for callings entirely different from those they plan for their future. The leader of the school orchestra professes to have succumbed to the attractions of creative chemistry!

Talks have been given on:

- From Druggist's Clerk to Registered Pharmacist.
- How to Bud Fruit Trees.
- The Place of an Accountant in Modern Business.
- An Automobile Mechanic.
- Foreign Wholesaling.
- A Chemist in a Creamery.
- The Life Insurance Agent.
- The Traveling Salesman.
- The Carpenter and His Service.
- Keeping Poultry for Profit.
- The Efficient Private Secretary.
- An Advertising Man.
- Opportunities for the Lawyer.

Where several boys were interested in one inclusive occupation, like accountancy, advertising, or salesmanship, the group was directed to meet as a committee and divide the field among themselves.

Meanwhile, several composition problems presented them-

selves. Principles of organization and paragraph structures were recollected and restated. The necessity for clear and varied sentence structure was self-evident. A useful little lesson in word distinction practically made itself:

1. Employer, proprietor, manager, foreman, superintendent, boss
2. Wages, salary, income, commission, bonus
3. Trade, profession, vocation, avocation, calling

All along the course of the work, naturally, the value of the pupil's interest has been noticeable. Few indeed were the necessary comments on monotony or lack of earnestness in the speakers. Practically all spoke with conviction and energy. Student critics and the speakers themselves were quick to notice how faults of posture and enunciation hampered the well-prepared speaker. Criticisms on poor grammar and diction were more than usually pointed.

As the written work came in, I found need for sharp attack on carelessness in mechanics. The rewriting was done with no protest, and the result was higher attainment on later sections of the work. Time failed for all the applied rhetoric which might have been so easily motivated. Some boys typed their papers; another time I should try for definite coördination with the typewriting department.

Results—Aside from those already mentioned, the boys have seemed to come nearer to a real interest and pride in correct and forceful expression, both oral and written. Another year I should start the project earlier, so as to have more time afterward to capitalize this growing feeling for effective English.

As a final contribution, I asked the boys to write for me a confidential statement, unsigned if they chose, of their frank opinion as to the interest and value of the project. Probably no such statements are ever wholly frank. But I found that the students' opinion, for the most part, had the ring of sincerity. They were unanimous in feeling that the project did tend to make routine tasks more purposeful. Nearly all told of how they had been stimulated to take a real interest in and to recognize the necessity for care in the choice of their life-work. They seemed to appreciate the widening of their knowledge of the business world in general. Several spoke

of having been helped by the study of the qualifications necessary for certain lines of work. They seemed to feel that there was less likelihood, as one phrased it, "of falling into any old job and sticking there." And they begin to realize, they said, how much help, even in trade and business, is to be derived from books.

Personally, I have been pleased beyond expectation with the success of the plan. It is amazing how possibilities open up in such a scheme, how one step leads to another, and how joint effort expands the original idea. Of course, every class might not coöperate so willingly. And composition will never, any more than dentistry, be absolutely painless. However, I recommend the vocational project not as an anodyne, but as a stimulant.

GETTING THE MESSAGE

FRANCIS J. CONLIN

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JOHN sat nibbling the end of his pen. The perplexed look on his face was due to the disappointing experience he had been going through for the past half hour. For the first time in his life, although he was now finishing his second year in high school, he had approached the writing of a composition with a feeling that he had something to say and wanted to say it. But for some reason his thoughts and emotions, though they seemed vivid and warm enough to him, could not find expression in words.

His situation was the result of a talk given by his English teacher a few days previous. The talk was in substance as follows:

"A piece of literature should be looked upon as a message, which one human being wishes to communicate to others. It is very much like the part each person contributes when a group of friends are in conversation. One member of the company, who has been deeply impressed by a drama he has witnessed, speaks of it enthusiastically, and urges the others to see it. Another, who understands radio, explains to his friends how

they may improve the receptive powers of their sets. Still another speaks glowingly of his college life, and perhaps kindles the spark of ambition in someone else's mind. Everyone present is anxious to do his share and is much elated if his remarks seem stimulating to his listeners.

"Sometimes, however, a man becomes possessed of an idea or experience that deserves more impressive and more permanent expression; this he embodies in a poem, an essay, a story, or a play. If his idea is permanently valuable to thinking people, and if he has expressed it in a manner pleasing to cultured minds, his work may take its place among the standard literary productions of his country. In this way he may be said to have sent forth his message to the world.

"Therefore, when we read a piece of literature we must look for more than entertainment; we must keep our minds alert for the author's message. This, in the long run, will afford us the highest kind of pleasure.

"We may become familiar with the practice of message sending in a very simple way. It is quite likely that every member of this class has sent and received many messages, some of them more helpful and suggestive than the sender realized. You will find it interesting to ask yourselves such questions as the following:

"'Have I ever received a message from any book I have read? From anything I have heard in conversation? What was it? Did it influence my way of thinking or of acting? Have I ever said anything that might influence another? Could I do so now, if I tried?'

"Perhaps the answer to one of these questions may furnish the subject for your next personal theme."

John had accepted this suggestion and found some of the questions stimulating. Yes, he recalled one very valuable message he had received in a letter sent by his friend Henry from Vermont during the previous summer. "Oh, Jack! You ought to be up here," it read. "The lake and the mountains are great. We sleep in a tent in a pine grove. No

more brick sidewalks and hot bedrooms for me." These words were strongly reënforced by the enclosed hotel advertisement with its alluring descriptive paragraphs and its inviting illustrations. Never before had written or printed matter so enkindled John's imagination. He dreamed that night of lying upon a cool bed of pine needles and of gazing upward between tall evergreens to the stars. He looked across a placid lake to friendly mountains that seemed to beckon to him. But he awoke to a hot, noisy city, to an accusing conscience. Why had he let a chance like this slip by? Why had he scoffed at Henry's suggestion last spring that they try to secure work at a summer hotel?

Though he did not know it at the time, the bitterness of the situation was a blessing in disguise; for the realization that a beautiful outdoor nature was calling to him, the determination never again to spend an aimless summer on city streets, and the new ambition to exert himself in order to better his condition, marked the beginning of a new period in his development.

As John sat nibbling his pen, he certainly had surging within him enough thought and feeling to produce a composition of vitality and interest. But he was almost inarticulate. The rather colorless theme that finally reached the teacher gave no indication of what was going on in the boy's mind, though the closing sentence caused him to pause. It read thus: "I have made up my mind to work every summer where I can see nature, and I am determined to get all the messages I can from people and from books." Was this sentence merely the boy's effort to make the conventional moral ending insisted upon in the elementary grades; or did he really mean it? This was at least a straw for the teacher to grasp at; so John was one of those called into personal conference that week.

At the beginning of the conference he was uncommunicative. But when the teacher sympathetically asked John to describe what had gone on in his mind after reading Henry's letter, and to tell why he was now interested in messages from books, the boy opened his mind freely, and rather surprised the teacher by his revelations.

"Well, John, from what you have said I see that you your-

self have a message to deliver; but I should never have guessed it from what you wrote. I think it would be distinctly worth while for you to choose this subject again for your personal theme next month. Think it over, and try to give it full expression.

"Meanwhile, I suggest that you choose for home reading a little volume of simple essays I have here. They will show you how direct and intimate authors sometimes become with their readers. Perhaps you will catch the spirit of this type of writing, and be able to tell your own experiences more freely."

This conference, with the reading and writing of the following months, was the beginning of John's insight into literature.

During the vacation months John's mind continued to mature. His dream of spending a summer in Vermont became a reality; he was now working in a hotel on the shores of Lake Champlain. Life seemed to begin anew. From the time he heard the birds singing in the early morning until he went to bed at night, every hour brought him new thoughts and experiences. His duties were not burdensome; they acted upon him as a stabilizing influence and gave him a healthful sense of usefulness and responsibility. Besides this, meeting so many people partly cured his self-consciousness and helped develop his power of self-expression. When off duty he spent most of his time on the lake. Though nearly always too busily engaged in rowing, swimming, or fishing to have much room in his mind for quiet thought, yet occasionally he gazed reflectively across the water to the distant mountains, and recalled his dream of the year before.

In the fall he took up his school work in a new spirit. Especially in the English class was this apparent. His literary studies of the previous spring were excellent preparation for the reading of the first half year—Addison, Irving, and Van Dyke. His ability to grasp the meaning and feel the spirit of each sketch or essay increased rapidly. Even the Sir Roger de Coverley Papers, generally so intangible to schoolboys for recitation purposes, seemed to take on definite meanings when the boy realized that each paper was a mes-

sage tactfully sent by the Spectator to the breakfast tables of the polite world of that day. He wondered what effect something similar would produce if placed before the guests of this Vermont hotel.

In catching the spirit of this literature he gained not a little help from his summer experience. His newly awakened interest in the world around him, especially in its people, made him see more in the essays he was reading and made him feel that they held some meaning for him. His fancy even located the people, the occurrences, and the places of the books, around the lake and its neighborhood. Van Dyke's little rivers flowed through Vermont fields and woodlands; and his Lady Graygown was identified with a gracious lady who had been very kind to John at the hotel. A country mansion that someone had said was in the old English style might well have been the estate of Sir Roger; and his chaplain could not have been very different from the minister in the neighboring village church. Surely that homely old bachelor who made so much fun for the guests at the hotel was a second Master Simon.

The home reading for this half year could not have been better suited to John's humor and needs. Most serious boys, whether or not they have enjoyed an inspiring summer experience like John's, come back to school at the beginning of their junior year considerably more earnest and mature than can be accounted for by the short time that has elapsed between June and September. I have often speculated upon this and have wondered if my explanation is correct. A second-year boy feels that he belongs to the lower school, and, therefore, his looking forward does not go beyond his school days but is limited to his desire to become an upper-school boy. In his third year, however, even at the beginning, he becomes conscious that the time is not far off when he must begin a new life either in college or, harder still, in the wide world. Therefore, he experiences this new sense of seriousness and responsibility. John's new interest in the making of a career found ample gratification in Edna Lyall's *Donovan*, Mrs. Mulock's *John Halifax*, and Mrs. Ward's *Robert Elsmere*, works that had been suggested by

the teacher as natural steps towards the appreciation of *Henry Esmond* and *David Copperfield*.

About this time John came accidentally upon a book that is seldom seen on high-school book lists; viz., Marie Corelli's *Thelma*. He, like many another boy who has taken a step towards cynicism on account of what he has seen and heard in the rougher districts of the city, testified to the potent tonic of this book. The high-minded young nobleman, Philip Errington, leaving behind a sordid London that disgusts him, sailing with his great-hearted friend, Lorimer, in their luxurious steam yacht to the romantic land of the midnight sun, winning for his bride the perfect woman, who knows nothing of the world, and returning to triumph over the roués and courtesans of the great metropolis, is the type of hero that can give the high-school boy just the moral uplift that he needs.

One day John was wondering why he could not find in such books as *Ivanhoe* and *The Tale of Two Cities* any special lesson or message. The same seemed to be true of the Shakesperian plays he had read. His admission of this difficulty in class led the teacher to a talk that gave him a much broader idea of what literary influence may be. The substance of the talk was this:

"The essay is the most direct type of literature. In it the author talks immediately to the reader without any character intervening. Thus his message is simple and easy to grasp. The same is true of lyric poetry, which you will study next year, though in the beginning this may be a little more difficult for you to interpret. The novelist or the playwright, however, of the Scott or Shakespeare type, is hidden behind his work. He sets up for the reader's perusal a little world of characters, places, and events. These the reader interprets and learns from, just as he does in the real world about him. Furthermore, works of this kind are so true to life that they help one to know human nature as it really is. Of course, some novelists and dramatists do aim to point a particular moral in each work, or solve some social problem; but Scott and Shakespeare are not inclined to do this.

"If you are looking for messages, consider the great influence that the life and total work of a man like Scott, for example, has upon a person who studies him sufficiently. From early youth Scott was fascinated by the study of the Middle Ages, when armored knights met in jousts or wandered through the world seeking to protect the weak and uphold the right. Their high ideals and vigorous conduct formed in his mind the conception of what manhood ought to be. And he lived up to his conception. If you read his life, you will find that his most brilliant knights were no greater heroes in their way than he was in his.

"I have spoken to you before of choosing some one author for thorough study. Scott would be very suitable for you now at your age. The book list will guide you."

Very soon after this, *Quentin Durward*, *Rob Roy*, and *Anne of Geierstein* kindled John's imagination; and Hutton's *Life of Scott*, selections from Lockhart, and Irving's *Abbotsford* set Sir Walter up before him as an ideal.

The transition from prose to poetry was easy when the *Idylls of the King* were being read in school while the *Waverley* novels were being read outside. John gradually began to feel that poetry lifted one to a rarer atmosphere. He, of course, encountered the greater difficulty of interpretation; but he was told that he must be willing to learn the language of the poets if he ever expected to enjoy their messages.

If it had not been for the shorter lyrical poems distributed through the year, senior English would have been a complete disappointment. Though he had the intelligence to see that there was much to admire in *Macbeth*, Milton's longer poems, Burke's speech, and Macaulay's *Essay on Johnson*, yet they made no personal appeal to him. But Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* was his delight. Here he found the personal reflections on life and nature that just suited his taste. He wrote some poetry himself for the school paper and was selected to write the class ode.

Of the books for home reading this year the one that affected him most was Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee*. Not only was the book fascinating in itself both for its

subject matter and its style, but it gave him a new thought: viz., that the same mind may be excellent both in science and in literature. Here was the author of the highly poetic *Blue Bird* writing a work that was reputed to be scientifically accurate and up to date, without yielding an iota in poetic quality. This was probably the final influence in his decision to plan a broader choice of studies for college than he had all along intended. It had been his intention to confine himself to his special field, the natural sciences, except where college rules forced him to take other subjects. Now he felt that this would have a narrowing influence upon him. He must make room for a generous proportion of literature.

In his last composition of the year, *A Review of My English Course in High School*, he wrote:

"Literature teaches us so much about life itself that everyone, no matter what his special calling may be, should look upon it as necessary to his mental health. My own intellectual growth took its first noticeable bound forward on the day when I first realized what it meant to get the message from literature."

EDITORIAL QUERIES

Have you answered Mr. de Mille's latest letter?

????

Would you prefer to spend your class time with *Nize Baby* or *Will Wimble*?

????

Have you ever heard Professor George Lyman Kittredge in a public lecture? If you have, aren't you grateful to the Executive Committee for persuading Professor Kittredge to be our guest at the luncheon on March twelfth?

????

Can you think of any topic of more general interest than the one selected for discussion at the Saturday morning meeting—*Oral Composition*?

Do you use any of the standardized tests in your English classes? Would you like to learn something new about them at the Friday afternoon meeting, March 11, at Harvard University?

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Are you planning to partake of all the various educational viands at our next two-day feast—the conference at Emerson Hall on Friday afternoon? The evening dinner at the Harvard Union? The Saturday morning program at Huntington Hall? The luncheon at one o'clock at the Brunswick—or some other hotel near Copley Square?

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Have you any suggestions—or protests against plenitude—to make to the President, Professor Roy Davis?

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